

Six Prayer Principles from Jesus, James, and Paul

Lesson 5

TEACHER TO TEACHER

One of my early teaching mentors was Bill Elkins. Bill taught vocational classes at the high school level and undergraduate courses at Texas A & M. He had a collection of favorite teaching axioms that he employed to coach some of us who taught under his supervision. One axiom posited that there were three levels of teachers: the beginner, the experienced or “professional,” and the master. Bill said that beginning teachers teach everything they know; experienced teachers teach everything in the book; master teachers teach just what their students need to know.

Bill often would teasingly say that he could tell what level of teacher he was dealing with by when they dismissed their classes. The beginning teacher lets his class go early; it doesn’t take him long to teach all he knows. The experienced teacher—teaching everything in the book—always kept his class late; it takes more time to teach everything in the book. The master teacher always dismisses on time. He knows what his students need and plans carefully to communicate just that..

Another of Bill’s teaching axioms was, “Master teachers know their students.” We might say, “Bible teacher, know your sheep.” Know their names; know them socially; know the struggles they face; know their familiarity with Scripture; know their levels of spiritual maturity. Only then can you teach them “just what they need to know.”

Without doubt, Jesus was the Master Teacher. He knew His followers well. He had great compassion for them and ministered directly to their needs. He knew how to use a few words to communicate many important principles. Think about the Lord’s Prayer. In Matthew’s longer version it contains only 52 English words (NIV). It is simple enough for a child to memorize and understand at some level, while its principles and truths are sufficiently profound to challenge and thrill the most mature among us. We devoted two lessons to interpreting the Prayer and only began to tease spiritual hearts with its truths.

In this lesson you will study six prayer principles. You can present all of them to your group by using the Suggested Lesson Plan. It will require that you use an “economy of words” when making your presentation. If you need to tweak the lesson plan, you know that you have the freedom to do that; just do it for the right reason.

The last two principles are gleaned from Paul’s writings and reflect two things that were very characteristic of his prayer life and ministry: praying for spiritual growth in the people under his watch-care and praying for the authority and power of God, through Christ, to reach the lost. Please be faithful to teach these to your group. They are simple but vital to us as a church called to help people “close the gap” in their spiritual lives.

May God freshly anoint you for the ministry of His Word to His people!



STUDYING THE WORD TOGETHER

We began our unit titled “Lord, Teach Me to Pray” by pointedly saying that no believer can become a spiritual mother or father without a vibrant prayer life. Thus far in our study, we have raised and answered two questions: “What is prayer?” and “Why pray?” We have studied together the Lord’s Prayer and discussed what it means to pray and minister “in Jesus’ Name.”

In this our final lesson on prayer, I want to bring to your attention some “pearls of wisdom” that I believe, if earnestly applied, will help believers enrich their intimate conversations with God and facilitate their growth toward spiritual maturity. We will look first at an additional teaching on prayer from Christ and then turn to the book of James. Then we will review some important principles taught and practiced by the Apostle Paul.

JESUS

Certainly, the Lord’s Prayer was the centerpiece of Christ’s teaching on prayer. However, Jesus taught and modeled much that was not included in the familiar prayer from Matthew 6. I want to cover one additional point that He made with His men.

► *Persist in Prayer*

Jesus taught his disciples the importance of persisting in prayer by telling them a story.

One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must never give up. “There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who was a godless man with great contempt for everyone. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, appealing for justice against someone who had harmed her. The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she wore him out. ‘I fear neither God nor man,’ he said to himself, ‘but this woman is driving me crazy. I’m going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!’”

Then the Lord said, “Learn a lesson from this evil judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end, so don’t you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who plead with him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?” (Luke 18:1-8 NLT)

Warren Wiersbe, in *The Bible Exposition Commentary*,¹ helps us better interpret this parable with a revealing piece about ancient Palestinian culture. He says:

As you study this parable, try to see it in its Eastern setting. The “courtroom” was not a fine building but a tent that was moved from place to place as the judge covered his circuit. The judge, not the law, set the agenda; and he sat regally in the tent surrounded by his assistants. Anybody could watch the proceedings from the outside, but only those who were approved and accepted could have their cases tried. This usually meant bribing one of the assistants so that he would call the judge’s attention to the case.

The widow had three obstacles to overcome. First, being a woman, she had

¹ *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Copyright © 1989 by Chariot Victor Publishing, an imprint of Cook Communication Ministries. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

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little standing before the law. In the Palestinian society of our Lord's day, women did not go to court. Since she was a widow, she had no husband to stand with her in court. Finally, she was poor and could not pay a bribe even if she wanted to. No wonder poor widows did not always get the protection the law was supposed to afford them!

Jesus' construction of this parable is masterful. With an economy of words He makes some important points.

1. The powerless widow, through labored persistence, got a favorable ruling from the uncaring but powerful judge. Had she given up, she would not have received justice.
2. We are not like the widow who is both a stranger to the judge and marginalized by the Palestinian culture of her day. Instead, we are God's chosen people. We are the adopted children of Abba, Father with an open invitation to the throne room.
3. God is not like the unjust and self-centered judge. He is a Father who earnestly desires to give His children good gifts and will not hesitate in doing so. Our God loves us and rewards persistence or perseverance in prayer.

When teaching this passage, one question always seems to arise: "Well, just how long should I keep praying?" Pastor Roger Barrier offers these suggestions:²

1. Keep praying until God answers the prayer.
2. Keeping praying until God tells you He is going to answer your prayer in the future.
3. Keep praying until God says, "No."

JAMES

James, the author of the New Testament book that bears his name,

was the brother of Christ and the bishop of the church in Jerusalem. Legend tells us that his knees were severely calloused from spending many, many hours kneeling in prayer, earning him the nickname "Old Camel Knees."³

The "testing of faith" is a central theme of James' New Testament book.

Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything.

(James 1:2-4 NLT)

In James, there are three primary passages on prayer (Jas 1:5-8; 4:1-4; 5:13-18), all of which are related to the idea of praying through the times that test or prove our faith. Incidentally, we endure these times so that our faith might be proven to us. God already knows where we stand. In these three key passages the brother of Christ admonishes us to:

1. Pray with faith
2. Pray with right motives
3. Pray energetically, ready to do God's Will

► Pray with Faith (James 1:5-8)

James 1:5-8 tells us that we can ask confidently for wisdom from God when we are in a "testing time."

If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. People like that should not

² Roger Barrier, "Sometimes God Delays," an undated sermon preached at Casas Adobes Baptist Church

³ Harold L. Willmington, *Willmington's Bible Handbook*, Copyright © 1997 by Harold L. Willmington, Published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, Ill.

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expect to receive anything from the Lord. They can't make up their minds.

They waver back and forth in everything they do. (James 1:5-8 NLT)

Verse six above begins to address the issue of praying with faith, contrasted to praying with uncertainty. The prayer of faith is raised up by one who has great confidence in God as He has revealed Himself in Christ and in the Scriptures. He has a confidence based upon a deep-seated belief in the veracity of God's revelation.

The man lacking confidence may not expect God to answer his prayer. Kittel and Friedrich tell us that "the man or woman who prays with uncertainty about God's true nature and character has an unsettled doubtful mind. Doubt in this case is neither philosophical skepticism nor the uncertainty of conflicting motives. Rather it is a disbelief that God can do what is requested. The man or woman who vacillates between confidence in God's coming answer and disbelief in His ability will receive nothing that He asks from God."⁴

► *Pray with Right Motives* (James 4:1-3)

Jesus taught us to pray that God's Will be done on earth as perfectly as it is in heaven. Jesus prayed prior to His arrest and death, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Too often we are tempted to pray manipulatively and selfishly. Look at what James says about such a situation:

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole *army of evil desires* at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are

jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them.

And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it. And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want *only what will give you pleasure*.

(James 4:1-3 NLT; italics mine)

To fully understand the power and intent of this passage, I think we need to know what the phrases "army of evil desires" and "give you pleasure" imply. The Greek word that leads to the rendering of both phrases is ἡδονή (hēdonē: NT:2237).⁵ In the New Testament it is used only to describe physical pleasure. Figuratively, it is used as desire, appetite, or lust. The English word *hedonism* is related to it. A hedonist operates from the "if it feels good, do it" mindset. James is saying here that if we ask God to grant us things to satisfy our human desires, appetites, and lusts, we are asking selfishly from hedonistic, impure, or wrong motives. Instead, we should be asking according to God's Will for us.

► *Pray Energetically, Ready to Do God's Will* (James 5:13-18)

In Lesson 10 of *The Prayer God Always Answers*,⁶ Roger presented several questions that, when asked of and answered by God, might help us better understand our suffering. In the fifth chapter of James, "Old Camel Knees" shares some wisdom that also is helpful to us as we prayerfully press through our suffering and testing in a way that honors God.

Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And

⁴ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Abridged)*, Copyright © 1985 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

⁵ *The Complete Word Study Bible and The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1994, 2002 AMG International, Inc.

⁶ Barrier and Wilkinson, *The Prayer God Always Answers: Lord Make me a Spiritual Parent at Any Cost*, Copyright © 2005 by Casas Adobes Baptist Church, Tucson, AZ, pp. 10-6—10-9.



those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again. (James 5:13-18 NLT)

May I invite you to do a simple exercise before we go further? Please reread the above passage, and without looking at my list below, circle or underline each mention of prayer.

How many did you find? I found eight:

1. Keep on praying about suffering—v.13
2. Continually sing thankful praises to the Lord (worship prayer, sung with instruments accompanying)—v.13
3. Elders pray and anoint the sick in the Name of the Lord—v.14
4. The Lord will heal the sick as the result of prayer offered in faith—v.15
5. Confess your sins and pray for each other—v.16
6. Earnest prayers of a righteous person are powerful and produce great results—v.16
7. An ordinary man like Elijah prayed earnestly and it did not rain—v. 17
8. Elijah prayed for rain and it came—v.18

Can there be any doubt that James believed in and taught the efficacy of earnest prayers offered in faith during our troublesome times? Let's focus now on verses 16 through 18 ("Confess your sins" through the end of the passage). These, after all, are the verses that bring focus and power to the others. Two questions immediately come to mind, don't they? What is an earnest prayer and who is righteous?

The word translated as *earnest* in the NLT is rendered as *powerful and effective* in the NIV and *powerful effect* in the TEV. It is, in fact, a form of the Greek word ἐνεργέω (energeo; NT:1754) and would perhaps better be translated *energetic*. The Barnes' Notes⁷ commentary says:

The word properly refers to that which has power; which in its own nature is fitted to produce an effect. It is not so much that it actually does produce an effect, as that it is fitted to do it. This is the kind of prayer referred to here. It is not listless, indifferent, cold, lifeless, as if there were no vitality in it, or power, but that which is adapted to be efficient—earnest, sincere, hearty, persevering. There is but a single word in the original to answer to the translation effectual fervent. Macknight and Doddridge suppose that the reference is to a kind of prayer "inwrought by the Spirit," or the "inwrought prayer;" but the whole force of the original is expressed by the word energetic, or earnest.

A "righteous" person, according to Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (abridged volume),⁸ is simply one who does God's Will. He is one who has both confessed his sins to God and is in right standing with his fellow man.

So James is saying here that a man who is committed to doing God's Will and whose sin debts have been

⁷ Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

⁸ Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Abridged), Copyright © 1985 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

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canceled can produce wonderful results when he energetically does the work of prayer. This is a statement that applies to every ordinary disciple. We are reminded that we cannot assume that it could be true only of those we consider to be spiritually elite. After all, as James says, even prophets like Elijah are “just as human as we are.”

PAUL

Paul’s Epistles provide strong evidence that his life as an evangelist, church planter, and spiritual mentor emanated from his prayer life. In fact, Paul operated within a kind of triangle made up of God, the churches he served, and himself.

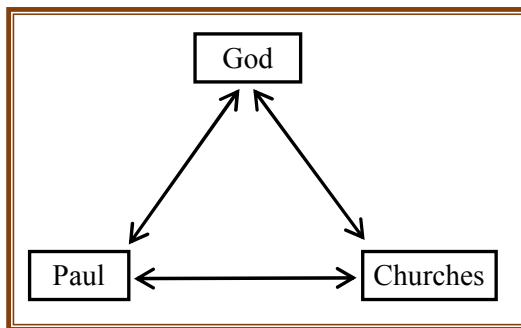


Fig. 4: Paul’s Triangle of Prayer

Throughout his epistles we see this pattern: Paul prayed to God for the people in the churches; he asked the churches to pray to God for him; the people in the churches prayed to God for Paul; God both prompted and answered the prayers. We can learn so much from the interdependence that is implicit in this pattern. However, in this lesson we will focus our attention on two ideas:

1. Paul’s devotion to praying for the spiritual growth of the leaders and members of the churches he served
2. Paul’s perspective that prayer is essential for effectiveness in bringing the lost to Christ

► Pray for Spiritual Growth in Others

I find very revealing the New Testament record of Paul’s prayers for the members of the churches that he served. Perhaps what is most startling is the fact that there is no record of him praying that God would provide their basic necessities—no prayers for “daily bread,” health or healing, improved financial conditions, etc. Paul seems to take up Christ’s admonition to “seek first the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 6:20, 33) and asks God to provide his “sheep” with the things necessary to spiritual growth.⁹ See the passages below for examples:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Ephesians 1:17-19a)

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

⁹ See “Keep the Temporal and Eternal in Proper Perspective” in Lesson 11 of *The Prayer God Always Answers: Lord, Make Me a Spiritual Parent at Any Cost*, Copyright © 2005 by Casas Adobes Baptist Church, Tucson, AZ, p. 11-7.

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And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (Colossians 1:9)

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. (Philemon 1:6)

Our calling as a church is to help people close the gap between their present spiritual reality and the life promised believers in Scripture. Our goal as Christians is to grow to become accurate reflections of Christ to those around us—to become spiritual mothers and fathers. Yet I seldom hear our people praying for one another the way Paul prayed for those who were part of the very early churches under his oversight. I believe Paul's patterns of praying for spiritual growth provide a profound lesson for:

1. Shepherds praying for their sheep
2. Sheep praying for their shepherd

3. Bible Fellowship members praying for one another
4. Spouses praying for one another
5. Parents praying for children
6. Friends praying for one another
7. A nation praying for her leaders

► Pray to Reach the Unsaved

The overwhelming desire of Paul's heart is explained clearly in Romans 10:1 where he says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved." We can safely guess that he prayed similarly for the Gentiles. Paul knew that he could not successfully carry out his apostolic commission from Christ in his own power. Instead, he needed the authority and power of the Lord. Consider these prayer requests from Paul:

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. (Colossians 4:3-4)

Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. (Ephesians 6:19-20)

He requested that the churches beseech God on his behalf, praying that God would accomplish three things:

1. Open a door for the message of the Gospel (Col. 4:3)
2. Help him speak clearly or plainly when he preached (Col. 4:4)
3. Give Paul courageous boldness in proclaiming the message of Christ (Eph. 6:19-20)

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Please notice that these requests essentially were offered on behalf of non-believers whom Paul hoped to reach with the Gospel of Jesus. Such requests were prompted by Paul's understanding that spiritual things could not be understood by men without the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14) and that Satan had "blinded the eyes of unbelievers" to keep them from receiving the good news of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).

It is crucial that the church have the authority and power of Christ, her Head, to carry out her mission of making disciples—of reaching non-believers (Matt. 26:18-20). We appropriate His power and authority in large measure through prayer. Where you find a church committed to righteousness and prayer, you find a powerful church—one reaching the lost with the power of the Holy Spirit for the Glory of Christ and God, His Father.

APPLICATION IDEAS AND QUESTIONS

This lesson provided us with six new prayer directives: persist in prayer;

pray with faith; pray with right motives; pray energetically, ready to do God's Will; pray for spiritual growth in others; and pray to reach the unsaved. I suggest that you consider them to be a plum line by which to gauge their application in your personal prayer life. Are you plum or out of plum? Are you persistent in praying a matter through or do you grow weary and give up? Do you pray firmly convinced that God will answer or do you waiver between faith and doubt? Do you pray for God's Will to be accomplished in your life or do you pray from self-satisfying motives, seeking to manipulate God? Do you pray energetically, ready to do God's Will or with laxity, not fully yielding to God? Do you share God's burden for the lost and pray for the manifestation of His power in the church to reach them or do you, as an unconcerned bystander, neglect praying for nonbelievers?

As you consider your degree of plum on these matters, ask the Holy Spirit: What actions need to be taken by you? By your Bible Fellowship?

COMMENTARY

Notes 

Some of the biblical words and concepts associated with this lesson can be confusing. The word *righteousness* is one. Its nuances have to be discerned by the context in which it is used. In addition, Paul's prayer vocabulary is very broad and intriguing. Thus I have included the following information in an attempt to bring clarity. I hope you find it both interesting and helpful.

► *Righteousness*¹

In all our thought of righteousness, it must be borne in mind that there is nothing in Christian revelation which will tell us what righteousness calls for in every particular circumstance. The differences between earlier and later practical standards of conduct and the differences between differing standards in different circumstances have led to much confusion in the realm of Christian thinking. We can keep our bearing, however, by remembering the double element in righteousness...on the one hand, the will to do right, and, on the other, the difficulty of determining in a particular circumstance just what the right is. The larger Christian conceptions always have an element of fluidity, or, rather, an element of expansiveness. For example, it is clearly a Christian obligation to treat all men with a spirit of good will or with a spirit of Christian love. But what does love call for in a particular case? We can only answer the question by saying that love seeks for whatever is best, both for him who receives and for him who gives. This may lead to one course of conduct in one situation and to quite a different course in another. We must, however, keep before us always the aim of the largest life for all persons whom we can reach. Christian righteousness today is

even more insistent upon material things, such as sanitary arrangements, than was the Code of Moses. The obligation to use the latest knowledge for the hygienic welfare is just as binding now as then, but "the latest knowledge" is a changing term. Material progress, education, and spiritual instruction are all influences which really make for full life.

Not only is present-day righteousness social and growing; it also is concerned, to a large degree, with the thought of the world which now is. Righteousness has too often been conceived of merely as the means of preparing for the life of some future Kingdom of Heaven. Present-day emphasis has not ceased to think of the life beyond this, but the life beyond this can best be met and faced by those who have been in the full sense righteous in the life that now is. There is here no break in true Christian continuity. The seers who have understood Christianity best always have insisted that to the fullest degree the present world must be redeemed by the life-giving forces of Christianity. We still insist that all idea of earthly righteousness takes its start from heavenly righteousness, or, rather, that the righteousness of man is to be based upon his conception of the righteousness of God. Present-day thinking concerns itself largely with the idea of the Immanence of God. God is in this present world.... Our present world then must be the sphere in which the righteousness of God and of man is to be set forth. God is conscience, and God is love. The present sphere is to be used for the manifestation of His holy love. The chief channel through which that holy love is to manifest itself is the conscience and love of the Christian believer.... Both conscience and love are to be kept close to the earth by emphasis upon the actual realities of the world in which we live.

¹ Adapted from *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database*, Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft.



► Pauline Prayer Vocabulary²

The Pauline prayer vocabulary is the richest in the NT, and the apostle uses prayer terms more frequently than any other writer. R. Morganthaler's NT word statistics indicate that 16 different words for prayer appear 105 times in the 13 canonical Pauline letters. (In comparison: Matthew has 8 words used 30 times; Mark only 5 used 18 times; Luke has 10 terms used 46 times; John, only 3 words used 18 times; Acts has 6 words used 36 times; Hebrews has 3 words, each used once. In the remainder of the NT 11 prayer terms are used 36 times.) The apostle's penchant for thanksgiving is striking: *eucharistēō* ("to give thanks") appears 23 times; and *eucharistia* ("thanksgiving") 12 times. Paul mentioned the subject of thanksgiving more often per page than any other Hellenistic author—pagan or Christian. The apostle's preferred words for petition are: *proseuchomai* ("to pray"), 19 times; *proseuchē* ("prayer"), 14 times; *deēsis* ("request, entreaty"), 12 times; and *epikaleō* ("to call upon"), 6 times. [One prominent scholar] discerned no unique terms for intercession: "Instead Paul uses general words for prayer in such a way as to imply that the prayer is on behalf of others."

Paul's prayer language contains terms that would have been familiar to virtually all first-century Greek-speaking readers—even those recently converted from paganism. Yet he uses these words in expressions which indicate his spiritual life had deep roots in OT Scripture,

particularly the Psalms. Similarities with Qumran texts have been suggested, and parallels with the LXX, used among Hellenistic Jews, have been noted. A growing number of scholars discern links between Paul's prayer language and the liturgical formulations of early Christian worship. There is a discernible tendency for commentators to regard full-orbed Christological expressions in the prayers, for example: "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Col 1:3; cf. Eph 1:2), as evidence of post-apostolic authorship. Yet very similar language may be found in prayer contexts in the chief letters of Paul:

- ◆ "[A]s you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ
- ◆ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:7-9 RSV; cf. 2 Co 1:3)

[One scholar] concludes that phrases from the wish-prayer of 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 probably were used in pre-Pauline Christian worship. Those familiar with research on the themes and expressions of the primitive kerygma are immediately struck with the repetition of many characteristic motifs in Paul's prayers. Terms such as proclaim, gospel, receive (a tradition), witness, the word of God, grace, faith, hope, and love are common in early Christian preaching. [Some scholars] ...find here evidence for a link between Paul's prayer language and the teaching of Jesus.

² Adapted from *Dictionary of Paul and His Letter*, s © 1993 by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. All rights reserved.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Notes 

NOTE TO TEACHER: This *suggested* lesson plan contains many elements that, if employed, will help maximize learning for life-change in your Bible Fellowship. If you are an experienced teacher, you have freedom to create your own plan based upon the “Studying the Word Together” section. If you are less experienced, we suggest that you “stick to the plan.” However, even less-experienced teachers should feel free to modify the plan based upon the needs of your Bible Fellowship. This plan is designed to be presented in 45 minutes. It is important, therefore, that you carefully plan your presentation so that you communicate the main points with brevity and clarity.

Focal Scriptures:

- ◆ Luke 18:1-8
- ◆ James 5:13-18
- ◆ Philemon 1:6

Teaching Goals:

- ◆ Learn: Students understand six prayer principles sufficiently to apply in their personal prayer lives
- ◆ Experience: Corporately praying principles from Scripture for each other from Philemon 1:6, for effectively reaching the lost

Before Class Begins:

- ◆ Distribute handouts.
- ◆ Write the six principles and the figure for Paul’s prayer triangle on your marker board, leaving blanks to be filled in on Lesson Notes.
- ◆ Enlist volunteers to read the selected passages in Steps Two, Three, and Five.

STEP ONE: GETTING READY TO LEARN (5 MINUTES)

- ◆ Create buzz groups of 4-6 people and refer them to the exercise “How My Kids Should Ask” on their Lesson Notes. Give them two minutes to brainstorm.
- ◆ Invite a few responses from the groups. Then explain that in today’s lesson we will explore six principles that Jesus, James, and Paul taught us to employ as we make requests of our loving Heavenly Father, whose unlimited resources are always used for our long-term best.

STEP TWO: JESUS (5 MINUTES)

- ◆ **Persist in Prayer:** Ask someone who reads aloud proficiently to read Luke 18:1-8 (NLT) from Lesson Notes.
- ◆ As you explain the importance of persisting in prayer, be sure to stress the contrast between the uncaring judge and our loving God.
- ◆ Fill in the blank for Lesson Notes.
- ◆ *Remember to carefully watch your time on Steps Two and Three, so that you can devote sufficient time to Paul’s prayers in Step Four and also assist your classmates in praying for one another in Step Five.*

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- ◆ 2-sided copies of Lesson Notes / Take-Home pages
- ◆ Pencils or pens for each person
- ◆ Dry erase markers and marker board or felt tip markers and a flip chart

TIME FRAME:

- ◆ 45 minutes

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LESSON NOTES BLANKS

One more prayer principle from Jesus:

- ◆ Persist in prayer

Prayer principles from James:

- ◆ Pray with faith
- ◆ Pray with right motives
- ◆ Pray energetically, ready to do God's Will

Prayer Principles from Paul:

- ◆ Pray for spiritual growth in others
- ◆ Pray to reach the lost

STEP THREE: JAMES (13 MINUTES)

- ◆ Remind your group of James' relationship to Jesus and his standing in the church. Read and comment on James 1:2-4 (NLT), clarifying the purpose of our testing (see p. 5-3).
- ◆ **Pray with Faith (James 1:5-8):** Stress that the problem here is a disbelief in God's nature, character, and ability to answer prayer.
- ◆ **Pray with Right Motives (James 4:1-3)** Explain the meanings of the phrases "army of evil desires" and "give you pleasure" (p. 5-4), and how those motives conflict with God's Will.
- ◆ **Pray Energetically, Ready to Do God's Will (James 5:13-18):** Ask another proficient reader to read this passage in the NLT version from Lesson Notes. Allow a minute for your students to circle and count the passage's references to prayer. Help them to understand and celebrate the fact that ordinary people can produce wonderful results in prayer!

STEP FOUR: PAUL (15 MINUTES)

- ◆ Explain Paul's Prayer Triangle (p. 5-6) and fill in the blanks for Lesson Notes.
- ◆ **Pray for Spiritual Growth in Others:** Wait to fill in the blank until you have completed the following exercise: *Select your favorite prayer from Paul's writings on pages 5-6—5-7. Explain that Paul prayed this prayer for his fellow believers—and that you want to pray it for your classmates. Have them close their eyes and focus on the blessings that you will pray. When you have finished the prayer, ask them to describe what they felt about being prayed for in this manner. Then ask if they noticed anything unusual about the prayer.* Now, fill in the blank as you teach the principle.

- ◆ Point out the other Scripture references under this principle. Encourage them to study them on their own as models to pray for their family, friends, and other near ones.
- ◆ **Pray to Reach the Unsaved:** Ask your classmates to identify what Paul was requesting the churches to pray on his behalf as you read Colossians 4:3-4 and Ephesians 6:19-20. Then explain that because nonbelievers are deceived and Satan actively works to prevent them from receiving the Good News, we must pray not only for the lost to hear and believe, but also for ourselves—that we may act with Christ's power and authority, effectively communicating God's love and drawing people to Him.

STEP FIVE: EXPERIENTIAL CLOSING (7 MINUTES)

- ◆ Ask your classmates to reflect for a moment upon which of the six principles may need more focus in their own prayer lives, and to silently ask the Holy Spirit to show them what actions they may need to take as a result.
- ◆ Have your third reader read Philemon 1:6 from Lesson Notes. Tell the group that you desire for each of them to live in the power of this scripture. Then divide into groups to pray for each other and themselves: to have compassion for the lost; to be bold in sharing their faith with lost friends, neighbors, or family members; that Christ through His Spirit would remove "blindness" that Satan has placed on eyes of lost, etc. This needs to be a corporate experience.
- ◆ As you dismiss, point out their Daily Reflections on their handout and encourage them to return next week for "Commissioned to Invite."

Today in My Department

How My Kids Should Ask

Imagine that you are a loving parent with unlimited resources. You always act with foolproof wisdom that produces the very best in long-term results for your children. What principles might you teach your children about making requests from you?

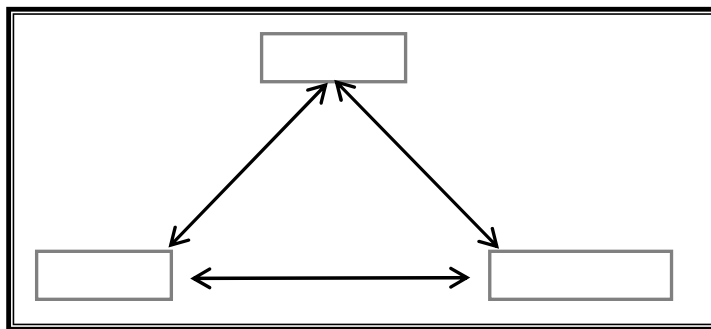
One more prayer principle from Jesus:

- ◆ _____ in prayer (Luke 18:1-8)

Prayer principles from James:

- ◆ Pray with _____ (James 1:5-8)
- ◆ Pray with right _____ (James 4:1-3)
- ◆ Pray _____, ready to do God's Will (James 5:13-18)

Prayer Principles from Paul:



- ◆ Pray for _____ in others (Ephesians 1:17-19, 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Philemon 1:6)
- ◆ Pray to _____ the _____ (Colossians 4:3-4; Ephesians 6:19-20; Philemon 1:6)

Today's Scriptures

Luke 18:1-8 (NLT) One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who was a godless man with great contempt for everyone. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, appealing for justice against someone who had harmed her. The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she wore him out. 'I fear neither God nor man,' he said to himself, 'but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'"

Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this evil judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end, so don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who plead with him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?"

James 5:13-18 (NLT) Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord.

Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.

Philemon 1:6 (NIV) I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

Next Week's Lesson:
Commissioned to Invite

Lesson 5

Six Prayer Principles from Jesus, James, and Paul

Growing Wise

Daily Reflections

Begin each daily reflection by meditating a few minutes on the suggested Scripture passage. Seek to listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to you. Then, consider the comments and questions about the passage. Be aware of both your thoughts and feelings. Respond to God through both.

Monday: *One day Jesus told his disciples a story to illustrate their need for constant prayer and to show them that they must never give up. (Luke 18:1 NLT)*

Jesus taught his disciples the importance of persisting in prayer. This is not so much a matter of obedience as it is a matter of perspective or heart. We persist in prayer because we see God as our Abba, Father who loves us and wants to give us good gifts that are good for us. Do you have a heart attitude that prompts you to persist in prayer with your Abba, Father?

Tuesday: *If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do. (James 1:5-8 NLT)*

When you pray, do you expect God to give you an answer, or do you pray just hoping He will respond? Do you pray to an impersonal, distant God or do you pray to the One Real God who is your Abba, Father? What might the Holy Spirit say to you about your expectations when you pray?

Wednesday: *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. (James 5:16 NLT)*

Remember, the righteous person is in good standing with God (his/her sins confessed and forgiven) and is ready to do His Will as it is revealed. Confess your sins, ask for forgiveness, and pray energetically, expecting God to respond!

Thursday: *For this reason I kneel before the Father...and...I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)*

What would it mean to you to know that someone was praying like this for you? Do you suppose that this might be the way that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are interceding for you? For whom might the Holy Spirit prompt you to pray this prayer? Pray this Scripture for that person right now!

Friday: *I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. (Philemon 1:6)*

There is an explicit instruction here: Actively share your faith! But notice the benefit of doing so: you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Imagine that! What would it mean to you to have such understanding? Ask the Holy Spirit to arrange frequent opportunities for you to share your faith and to receive the promised understanding.

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